

REPORT OF	Councillor George Davies
CABINET PORTFOLIO	Housing and Planning
CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER	Brian Bailey – Corporate Director for Housing and Economic Growth

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relating to his portfolio.

1 GOOD QUALITY HOUSING THAT MEETS RESIDENTS' NEEDS

I want to start my update to Members this month with our Local Plan, which Members are aware is incredibly important. First, I want to thank the many hundreds of residents who have attended public meetings, written to Councillors and put their ideas, suggestions and concerns forward as part of the consultation process.

Making sure our Local Plan is truly local, underpinned with local knowledge and the views of our local people, could not be more important.

I also want to thank our officers, who have worked tirelessly at the many public meetings and consultation events to make sure residents have been able to ask questions and get immediate answers on this sensitive and vital piece of legislation.

It's clear that the potential impact on our Green Belt comes from the Government housing formula and target we have been working to. We have challenged that number in the past, and we were heartened recently to see the new ONS projections potentially significantly reduce the target and therefore the need to open up Green Belt land for development.

We do not know yet how Government ministers will respond to the ONS projections. We remain absolutely committed to delivering a Local Plan which is fit for Wirral – and delivering it in the timescale we have set out – and I pledge to keep all Members full informed as we continue to consult with local people and work with MHCLG.

For more on our Local Plan, Members can read the coverage in the [Liverpool Echo](#), the [Wirral Globe](#) and our [Wirral View](#) publication.

While it is clearly important to make sure we provide enough new homes in the future to meet our residents' needs, we must never lose sight of the need to enable our residents now to live in good quality, safe homes. That is why I was so pleased earlier this month when Cabinet agreed to extend the Selective Licensing scheme to four more areas of the borough.

The [Wirral Globe](#) reported this increased crackdown on rogue landlords earlier this month, and I hope Members of all parties will join me in supporting this important initiative.

The council has made 42 prosecutions against people who have either failed to obtain licences for their properties or fallen foul of conditions originally agreed to as part of its Selective Licensing scheme. The scheme requires landlords to agree to a range of conditions around the standards of their accommodation. Cabinet agreed this last week.

We will not tolerate Wirral residents being forced to live in poor conditions by irresponsible landlords. This licensing scheme is a good way for us to tackle this issue and, where a landlord does not live up to their responsibilities to their tenants, we will not hesitate to take action against them.

Wirral residents demand – and deserve – to live in good quality, safe and attractive housing. The availability of private rented accommodation has more than doubled in Wirral in the last 10 years and while we know that many of these properties are of an excellent standard, managed by responsible landlords, there are others that aren't up to scratch.”

Finally, I think it is important Members are aware of the work we are doing to bring empty homes back into use. Since April 2015 nearly 900 properties that had been neglected or left unoccupied by their owners have been returned to the housing market, many as a result of the help and guidance offered by the council's housing team.

An Empty Property Grant, worth up to £5,000, could help with refurbishment costs of a property located within a designated Selective Licensing area which has been vacant for at least six months. Individuals can apply for a maximum of three separate Empty Property Grants per financial year.

The council also supports empty property owners find tenants or even sell their property. Properties can be advertised to thousands of potential tenants through the council's Property Pool Plus website or buyers through the council's developers list.

Read more about these efforts in [Wirral View](#).